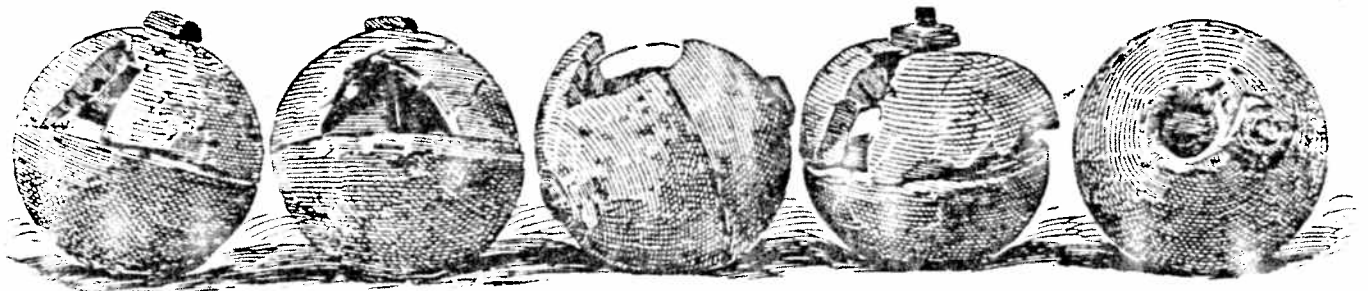


# HAYMARKET TRAGEDY DISTRICT

Preliminary Staff Summary of Information

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks  
February, 1988 (revision of 1971 report)



## HAYMARKET SITE DISTRICT

- site of the Haymarket meeting
- Zepf's Hall, 630 West Lake Street
- Crane Company factory and Crane's Alley, Jefferson between Randolph and Lake streets.

There is some irony in the fact that the event known as the Haymarket tragedy—or riot or incident—did not actually take place in Haymarket Square and the fact that the eight men found guilty of turning the Haymarket meeting into a tragedy—or riot were not responsible for what transpired. Four of the men were not even in attendance on the night of May 4, 1886, when a bomb was thrown at policemen breaking up a crowd that had been listening to speakers for several hours. Popular opinion across the nation that year, and especially in Chicago that week, had been inflamed by fear and by a sense of instability. After almost a decade of labor strife on a heretofore unknown scale, there seemed to be too many foreigners in the cities, and the cities had grown too big too fast. Bomb-toting anarchists were threatening to overthrow the established order in response to extremes of wealth and poverty that seemed unbridgable except perhaps by extreme measures. The response to what happened at Haymarket, to the incident itself and the trial that followed the next year, was broad and sustained. Haymarket attracted international attention at the time and was not forgotten in the following decades. Even today, Haymarket demands attention and reflection: what really happened there and why should it be remembered?

The decade of the 1870s saw the rise of labor strife in the United States, culminating in the nationwide railroad strike of 1877. An economic depression had begun in 1873. When the Baltimore & Ohio railroad cut wages ten per cent, a strike began that spread across the nation for two weeks and resulted in many dead and injured workers and considerable property damage. Although the railroad strike was the largest labor event of the time, leading some radicals to expect a general uprising by the working class, it was only one manifestation of labor troubles. Strikes, lockouts, blacklisting, and using detectives from the Pinkerton agency as spies and strikebreakers were features of labor-management

relations at the time. The workingman felt that the contempt of industrialists for the laborers was matched by that of the newspapers. While strikers often engaged in wild, bloodthirsty oratory, so did the newspapers and other spokesmen for capital with the result that there was constant provocation of class prejudice on both sides.

A period of brief prosperity in the early 1880s was followed in 1884 by another depression, bringing more wage cuts, more strikes and lockouts, widespread unemployment, and critical destitution among the poor. In this atmosphere, the socialist movement, brought to the United States by German immigrants, grew strong, and the agitation for an eight-hour day, which had been lively in the 1860s and dormant during the depressed 1870s, revived. Most socialists were ordinary citizens interested in improving social conditions, but a few radicals took up the cause of anarchism in the belief that all agencies of government were against the working class. In the 1880s, these radicals began to talk of using dynamite and educate themselves in the making of bombs.

As strike after strike gripped Chicago, there were numerous incidents of riotous behavior by the strikers and inflammatory speeches and writings by the radicals. In 1885, bloody incidents occurred at the McCormick Reaper Works on Blue Island Avenue during a strike following a cut in wages. During a streetcar strike, not only strikers but nonstriking workers and businessmen who happened to be in the area were clubbed.

By 1886, the movement for an eight-hour day had reached fever pitch, and the date of May 1 was set for a national demonstration, with walkouts to take place in the principal industries. The country was tense. Employers feared a unified labor force, and alarmists saw the dawn of social revolution. On that day, more than 50,000 Chicago workers were on strike or locked out, demanding, in addition to an eight-hour day, union recognition and higher pay.

May 1 passed peacefully, contrary to the expectations of much of the public. 80,000 people paraded down Michigan Avenue, watched from rooftops by police and militia. May 2, a Sunday, was also calm. On May 3, August Spies, editor of the anarchist paper *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, addressed a rally of several thousand striking lumber-shovers and supporters, held near the McCormick Reaper Works where 1,500 workers had been locked out and replaced by strikebreakers protected by 300 Pinkertons. Near the end of his talk, trouble broke out between McCormick strikers and scabs, bringing police riot squads to the spot. Mayor Carter Harrison rode to the scene on his white horse but left believing that the situation was under control. Against Spies's advice, several hundred of his listeners joined the fracas, and at length, he too went to the scene in his role of newspaperman. When the fight, in which several policemen were injured, was over, two rioters lay dead, and Spies, outraged, dashed to his office and quickly turned out circulars in English and German calling the workers "To Arms!" In his newspaper story, he declared that if the "brothers" had been supplied with a bomb, not one of the "murderers" would have escaped.

On the evening of May 3, a small gathering of anarchists met and planned a mass rally

for the next evening. The Haymarket, a widened two-block section of Randolph Street between Halsted and Desplaines streets that could accommodate 20,000 people, was selected as the meeting site. Adolph Fischer, a printer and co-founder with George Engel of the *Anarchist*, a newspaper advocating violent revolution, was responsible for printing a flyer to announce the meeting. Printed in German and English, as was most socialist and anarchist material, the flyer contained the words, "Workingmen Arm Yourselves and Appear in Full Force!" When Fischer asked Spies to speak at the meeting, Spies agreed but only if that line was excised. Although the flyer was amended and most copies with the offending line destroyed, several hundred copies were distributed along with the new flyers. The original was to be a key piece of evidence in the subsequent Haymarket trial.

The promoters of the meeting had expected 25,000 workingmen to turn out, but at its peak the crowd that gathered was not more than 3,000, and during the meeting, no more than 1,000 were present because it was late getting started. Due to the small crowd, the meeting was moved to the mouth of Crane's alley, a half-block away, on the east side of Desplaines Street a short distance north of Randolph Street, alongside the Crane Company factory. Michael Schwab, associate editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, arrived early but left to give a speech at the Deering Reaper Company on the northwest side of the city.

The meeting was peaceful, and Mayor Carter Harrison was present during most of it. The mayor, who was sympathetic to the eight-hour movement, attended the meeting to ensure by his presence the peacefulness of the gathering. When he left, he went to the Desplaines Street police station nearby and advised Police Captain John Bonfield to dismiss the force of reserves he was holding there in case of trouble. By 10 p.m., after Spies and Albert Parsons, editor of the anarchist paper *The Alarm*, had finished speaking, and as Samuel Fielden, a teamster and preacher who was part of the radical group, was finishing his speech, only some 300 people remained at the site. Parsons, along with his family and friends and Fischer, had left the meeting after Parsons spoke and walked half a block north to Zepf's hall, a tavern and meeting hall. At this point, Inspector Bonfield, apparently not wanting to lose his opportunity to do his part to fight for order, led his force of 186 men to the meeting site. Captain William Ward shouted, "I command you, in the name of the people of the State of Illinois, to immediately and peacefully to disperse!" "But we are peaceable!" said Fielden, but getting down from the speaker's wagon, he said, "All right, we'll go."

Almost immediately, a bomb exploded in the crowd and pandemonium ensued as the police and possibly some workers began shooting. No one knows how many civilians were shot because the wounded and dead were dragged away by their friends, and the newspapers, in their detailed accounts of the incident, were not interested in counting civilian casualties. One policeman, Officer Mathias J. Degan, was killed outright by the bomb, six other officers died later, and sixty others were wounded. Medical evidence would later show that most of these injuries and some of the deaths were caused by police bullets fired wildly in the confusion.

To this day, the identity of the bomb-thrower is not known for certain. At the time,

there was even speculation among the radicals that the police may have thrown it, but the best evidence points to a little-known anarchist by the name of George Meng. In the frenzy that followed the event, all well-known anarchists and socialists were arrested by the police, and on May 27, thirty-one men were named in criminal indictments. Of these, only eight were actually put on trial: Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Adolph Fischer, Michael Schwab, George Engel, and Louis Lingg, carpenter and union organizer and co-owner of a small yeast company. Of these, only Spies and Fielden had actually been at the scene when the bomb was thrown. Parsons and Fischer had left; Schwab had left before the meeting began. Engel and Neebe were at their homes that evening. Lingg spent the evening at a North Side meeting hall to which he was delivering dynamite bombs he made that afternoon.

The trial began July 15, 1886, and the verdict was delivered on August 20: death for all but Neebe who was given fifteen years imprisonment. The eight were convicted on the grounds that although the identity of the bomb-thrower was unknown, the inflammatory speeches and publications of the men had incited the deed. In September, 1887, the Illinois Supreme Court upheld the death verdicts; in November, the U. S. Supreme Court listened to arguments but refused to review the verdict.

During the year since the tragedy, public sentiment had undergone a change, and Governor Richard J. Oglesby was swamped with petitions for clemency, not only from 60,000 Chicagoans, but from people all around the country and all over the world. Nearly every sitting judge in Cook County and nearly every prominent lawyer in Chicago was outraged by the trial, and prominent businessmen like Potter Palmer; Marvin Hughitt, president of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway; and Lyman Gage, president of the First National Bank of Chicago, signed the petitions. Even Judge Gary, known to have been prejudiced against organized labor as well as against socialists and anarchists had a change of heart. So did State's Attorney Julius S. Grinnell, who had publicly counseled, "Make the raids first and look up the law afterward!" when the anarchists and socialists were being rounded up. Judge Gary sent the Governor an appeal for clemency for Fielden, and Grinnell sent an appeal for for Fielden and Schwab.

On November 10, the Governor commuted the sentences of Fielden and Schwab to life imprisonment because they had expressed regret over their part in the Haymarket affair, but he did not include Spies who also had signed such a statement. That same day, Lingg committed suicide in Cook County Jail by smoking a cigar containing dynamite, given to him by an anarchist friend.

On November 11, Spies, Parsons, Engel, and Fischer were hanged. Spies's final words would later be carved on the monument marking the men's burial site in Waldheim Cemetery: "The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you are throttling today."

When Governor John Peter Altgeld took office on January 10, 1893, the petitioners for amnesty for the imprisoned anarchists, who had been unable to move Altgeld's prede-

cessor, Governor Joseph W. Fifer, took new hope. This time, their hope was not in vain. On June 26, 1893, after carefully reviewing the evidence and the record of the trial, Governor Altgeld granted an absolute pardon to Fielden, Schwab, and Neebe. In his *Reasons for Pardoning*, Altgeld contended that Captain Bonfield was responsible for the outbreak of violence at Haymarket by moving in on the meeting as it was breaking up. As for the trial, Altgeld wrote, "the jury which tried the case was a packed jury selected to convict"; that "the jurors, according to their own answers, were not competent jurors, and the trial was, therefore, not a legal trial"; that "the defendants were not proven to be guilty of the crime charged in the indictment"; that "as to defendant Neebe, the State's Attorney had declared that there was no case against him, and yet he has been kept in jail all these years"; and that "the trial judge was either so prejudiced against the defendants, or else so determined to win the applause of a certain class in the community that he could not and did not grant a fair trial." For his decision, the governor was vilified by many and honored by many others.

The year of the governor's pardon was the year in which the monument over the graves of Parsons, Spies, Fischer, Engel, and Lingg was dedicated. On the monument, the figure of a woman, representing Justice, prepares to draw her sword as she places a laurel wreath on the head of a fallen worker. The dedication took place during the Columbian Exposition, and foreign delegations were in attendance. When Schwab died in 1898 and Neebe in 1916, they were buried there, as were other family members and supporters in later years. Emma Goldman, the Russian-born American anarchist who was deported by the U. S. government in 1919 and died in Canada in 1940, traced the origins of her radicalism to Haymarket and asked to be buried near the monument. Over the years, others whose lives were influenced by the events of 1886-87 were buried or had their ashes scattered by the monument.

The police also had their monument. A statue of a policeman with upraised arm was placed in Haymarket Square, the statue's base carved with the words, "In the name of the people I command peace." The statue was dedicated in 1889, and over the years, it became the focus of repeated vandalism. In 1903, the crests of the city and state were stolen from the base. In 1927, on the anniversary of Haymarket, a streetcar driver ran his vehicle into the statue, saying later he was sick of seeing it. The statue was repaired and relocated in Union Park. In 1956, the statue was moved to a new base nearer to Haymarket. The base remains today, but the statue now stands in police headquarters at State and 11th streets. During the 1960s, the statue had been first doused with black paint and then bombed twice, in 1969 and 1970. When a permanent guard proved too expensive, the statue was moved into police headquarters.

In the decade before Haymarket, worried businessmen in many cities promoted the construction of central area armories to protect their property and persons from anarchists. In the wake of Haymarket, some of Chicago's wealthiest citizens raised funds to buy land thirty miles north of Chicago for the establishment of federal military outposts, later known as Fort Sheridan and the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, that could, if necessary, protect Chicago from revolution. As William Adelman points out in *Haymarket Re-*

visited, the wealthy soon began moving out of Chicago in the direction of the bases, establishing a line of suburbs along the shore of Lake Michigan. Commemorations of Haymarket continued for many years, and outside of the United States, where September 1 was already celebrated as Labor Day, May 1 became the day to honor the worker in memory of the 1886 May 1st demonstration in Chicago for the eight-hour day. In *The Haymarket Tragedy*, Paul Avrich points out that with its many outcomes, Haymarket was a major event in American history:

For the first time it brought anarchism to the attention of the general public, identifying it with terrorist violence and inspiring a horror of its teachings and practices. Equally important, it marked the climax of one of the most bitter industrial struggles in American's experience, interrupting the eight-hour movement and turning labor away from radical doctrines for years to come . . . it gave to the labor movement its first revolutionary martyrs, whose sense of outrage against economic and social injustice, whose vision of a society in which the resources of production are available for the benefit of all, provided an inspiration for workers of every stripe.

As for the Haymarket trial, Avrich points out that it "has been recognized as one of the most unjust in the annals of American jurisprudence." A century after the event, questions still remain regarding what happened before, during, and after the riot that took place near Haymarket Square. What is clear is the impact the event had on Chicago, the labor movement, and on the entire world.

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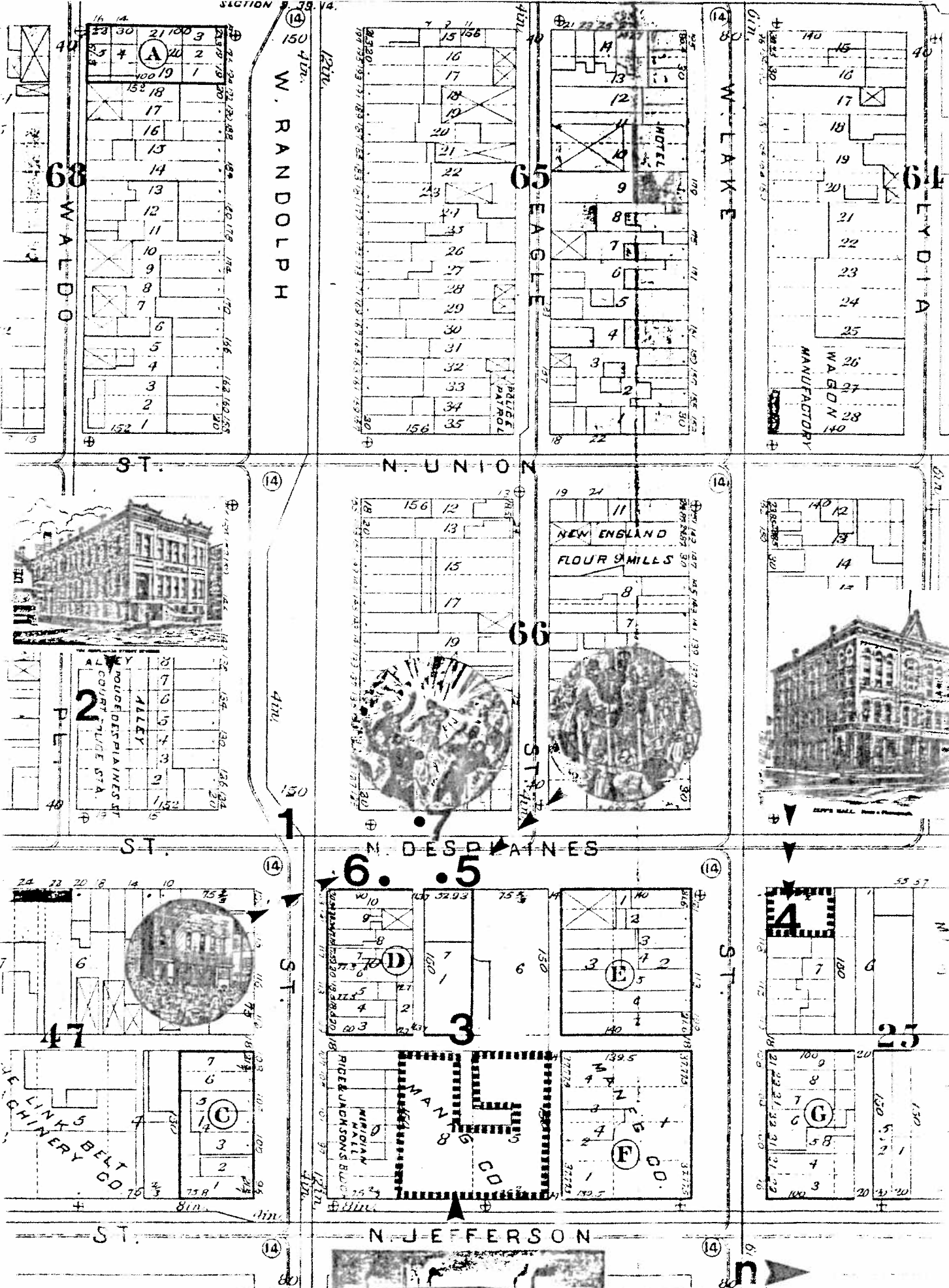
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*Staff for this publication*

Joan Pomaranc, *research and writing*

Janice Curtis, *production assistant*



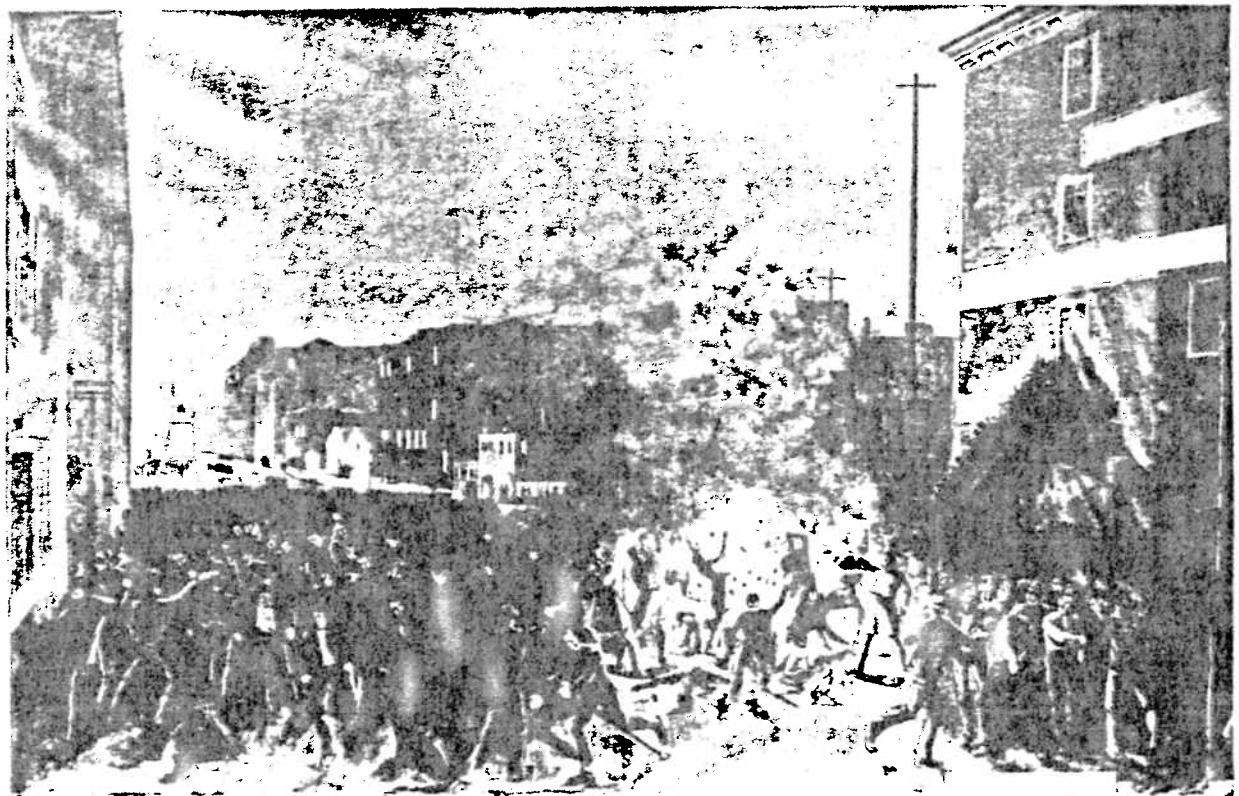


Existing buildings



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MEETING AT THE HAYMARKET SQUARE, BEFORE THE EXPLOSION OF THE BOMB.  
CHICAGO, MAY 4, 1886.



Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1887 by PAUL J. MONARD, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

EXPLOSION OF THE BOMB AT HAYMARKET SQUARE,  
Chicago, May 4, 1886.



"The Anarchists of Chicago": Memorial drawing by Walter Crane, 1894





*The Commission on Chicago Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to the designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from the qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.*

*The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. This preliminary summary of information has been prepared by the Commission staff and was submitted to the Commission when it initiated consideration of the historical and architectural qualities of this potential landmark.*